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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses parody as an effective pedagogical device and as a way of teaching recognition of, and appreciation for, form. If the subject parodied is in poetic form, then rhyme and rhythm become factors for the parodist to consider. If the subject parodied is in prose, then the parodist must address the techniques of narrative, exposition, description, and dialogue. The paper offers examples of original poetry by famous authors, with accompanying parodies, many by the author himself. Without providing any original text, the author also provides a parody of Hemingway's prose story "Hills Like White Elephants." Many of the parodies are bawdy in word and content. (CR)

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Using Parody to Teach Some Writing Elements.

by John Hurley

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Using Parody To Teach Some Writing Elements

The obvious twofold goal of the parodist is to be funny while exposing his model, the original work, to ridicule. After viewing a successful parody and exhausting our laughter we are likely to put the work out of mind, as if it served no other useful purpose. A closer look, however, will make us aware of the parody as something a bit more serious, for it is an effective pedagogical device and provides a neat way of teaching recognition of, and appreciation for, form. Such recognition, of course, implies an awareness of the need for discipline in writing. If the subject parodied is poetic, then attention to rhyme and rhythm becomes a factor for writers to consider. If the work is prosaic, then the parodist must address the techniques of narrative, exposition, description, dialogue, all of these, while trying to keep the reader near the familiar ground of the original. Add to this the necessity to sustain humor, however long the piece, and the result is a composition problem that is simultaneously a writing challenge and a great learning experience. For openers, take Shakespeare's "Sonnet xviii," which lends itself invitingly to the parodist:

Sonnet xviii

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest;
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

How sincere Shakespeare was in this tribute is hard to say. Taken at face value, though, it is as complimentary a sonnet as has ever been

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written. Aside from doting over the woman's beauty, Shakespeare gives himself a pat on the back, giving us a hint of the immortality he expects to achieve. If those last two lines tell us anything about the Bard, it is that he was quite certain about his own place in literary history. He also reminds us that as long as men can breathe, men will be men and invites the maker of parodies to share the stage with him, thus providing the opportunity to instruct while entertaining:

Sonnet -xviii
Shall I compare thee to a winter's night?
Thou art frigid and far more dreary.
Bright colors do mellow brisk autumn's bite,
And rain-dropped summer relieves the weary.
The most severe storm, by God, soon abates
And snowflakes descend sometimes like honey,
And foulness sometimes from the foul escapes
With nature's help--or with help of money.
But thy abysmal winter lingers on,
Squeezing sap from limb till it grows limp
Reducing what was vigorous and strong
To middling-size, to small, and even shrimp.
So long as politicians, dear, are true,
So long may you last. So, Winter, adieu.

Now Christopher Marlowe moves in another direction with an invitation that is nothing more than a sixteenth-century proposition. He strings together a series of couplets to form quatrains and gives us a rather bouncy rhythm to accommodate the frivolous text. It's a vividly playful piece loaded with beautiful imagery. It is also a great temptation to the parodist.

The Passionate Shepherd To His Love
Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dales and field,
Or woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy buds
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love.

Thy silver dishes for thy meat
As precious as the gods do eat,
Shall on an ivory table be
Prepared each day for thee and me.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love.

As is often the case, the original inspires fresh ideas and new twists in the same way that serious works inspire innovative serious works. Just as Vergil took his cues from Homer's epic poetry, and Shakespeare's, *Comedy of Errors* derived new energy from Plautus, the parodist, though more closely adhering to the form of his original, can exercise his imagination and his intellect freely.

The Passionate Bestial To His Lamb

Come live with me and serve my pleasure
And share with me your precious treasure,
Your warmth, your wool, your babaa, too
And I'll give all my love to you.

We'll spend the hours on verdant grasses
Watching shepherds and little lasses.
By murmuring streams, we'll sit, will we,
Checking out each other's pee.

I'll make you a bed of grass and thistle,
The better to make you wince and whistle.
For pleasures alone provide no gain
Till pleasure's mixed with pleasing pain.

Your gown of beautiful, splendid wool
I'll not tear, nor roughly pull,
For people of the modern school
Love to love without being cruel.

I'll make a bed of grass and flowers
And love you vigorously for hours,
But if my strength prove not that great,
I'll kiss your ass to compensate

Or whisper love talk in your ear,
Massage your neck or luscious rear,
With help of mellow Irish whiskey,
(Which will make me more frisky).

I'll even outshine that bitch Bo Peep
For you, my favorite choice of sheep.
So come, come (and pray that I can),
And I'll prove to be your favorite man.

Lewis Carroll, in his "Father William," shows us once more how parody confines itself to the original form while freeing both the imagination and the intellect, as he has fun with Robert Southey's didactic piece, "The Old Man's Comforts."

The Old Man's Comforts
(And how he gained them)
Robert Southey

"You are old, Father William," the young man cried;
"The few locks which are left you are gray;
You are hale, Father William,—a hearty old man:
Now tell me the reason, I pray."

"In the days of my youth," Father William replied,
"I remembered that youth would fly fast,
And abused not my health and my vigor at first,
That I never might need them at last."

"You are old, Father William," the young man cried,
"And pleasures with youth pass away;
And yet you lament not the days that are gone:
Now tell me the reason, I pray."

"In the days of my youth," Father William replied,
"I remembered that youth could not last;
I thought of the future, whatever I did,
That I never might grieve for the past."

"You are old, Father William," the young man cried,
"And life must be hastening away;
You are cheerful, and love to converse upon death:
Now tell me the reason, I pray.

"I am cheerful, young man," Father William replied,
"Let the cause they attention engage;
In the days of my youth, I remembered my God,
And He hath not forgotten my age."

Father William
Lewis Carroll

"You are old,Father William," the young man said,
"And you hair has become very white,
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,
"I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again."

"You are old," said the youth, "as I mentioned before
And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door—
Pray, what is the reason of that?"

"In my youth," said the sage, as he shook his gray locks,
"I kept all my limbs very supple
By the use of this ointment—one shilling the box—
Allow me to sell you a couple?"

"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—
Pray, how did you manage to do it?"

"In my youth,"said his father, "I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw
Has lasted the rest of my life."

"You are old," said the youth "one would hardly suppose
That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose—
What made you so awfully clever?"

"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"
Said his father; "don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I'll kick you downstairs!"

Robert Frost, in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," has been an American favorite for quite some time and has always been treated with respect, if not reverence. There's no question that it is a lovely lyric whose apparent simplicity tends sometimes to take readers past its studied ambiguity. "His woods" (deity maybe?),the "darkest evening," "promises to keep, "miles" to go before he "sleeps" all provide bonuses for the careful reader. The poem also lends itself to parody, and there have been efforts.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
Robert Frost

Whose woods these are, I think I know.
His house is in the village, though.
He will not mind me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bell a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to go before I sleep.

The parody which follows retains the setting but with a time shift, a more practical fellow, and a horse who's more like a "lookout," and the object of the traveler's interest changes as radically as the tone of the piece. Once again, however, form, style, rhyme scheme, stanzaic arrangement, and title all key the reader to the original.

Stopping by House on a Scary Morning

Whose house this is, I'm sure I know.
Her hubby's in the village, though.
So I'll just stop and chat a while
And show the girl a little style.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop with hubby very near,
For seeing him will hardly thrill me
And seeing me, he's bound to kill me.

So the little nag just rings his bell
To ask me if I'm really well.
The only other sound's the noise
Of a heartbeat like a frightened boy's.

This woman is lovely, dark, and deep.
And over her I've lost much sleep.
But, oops! My horse is off and running
Because he hears her hubby coming,
Because he hears her hubby coming.

For shorter poetry I have chosen the limerick, its present status notwithstanding. It wasn't always the humorous, rowdy form it has become, for it gained considerable prominence in the hands of Edward Lear, whose limericks were often accompanied by quaint drawings. They were rather bland pieces, not terribly funny, and employed the last line often as a repetition or near-repetition of the first line. In the contemporary limerick, however, we look for the last line to function like the punch line in a joke, for the modern limerick is essentially, or ought to be, a funny poem and is often rowdy. The abundance of Lear limericks in circulation and their obvious absence of humor, however, provide "easy pickings" for the parodist and cater to his predatory inclinations. As a pedagogical device, the limerick is the ideal poetic form because of its brevity and ease of imitation. Still, rhyme, rhythm, clarity, narrative flow, sentence structure, punctuation, and emphasis are elements that the writer, student or otherwise, cannot ignore. These few will suffice.

Lear: There was a young lady from Norway
Who casually sat in a doorway.
When the door squeezed her flat,
She said," What of that?"
This courageous young lady of Norway

Parody: There was a young lady from Norway
Who hung by her toes in the doorway.
She said to her beau,
"Hey, look at this, Joe.
I think I've discovered one more way."**

Lear: There was an old man of Cape Horn
Who wished he had never been born:
So he sat on a chair
Till he died of despair
That dolorous Man of Cape Horn.

Parody: There was a young man from Cape Horn

Who wished he had never been born.
And he wouldn't have been
If his father had seen
That the end of the rubber was torn.

The limerick is a nice form to work with because problems with sentence structure, punctuation, emphasis, rhyme and tone are as visible as flashing red lights. Once the writer reads his material aloud or has someone else do it, the rhythmic flaws speak for themselves.

I'm going to complete this frivolous tour with the short story. Here, of course, the challenge is to sustain the pace of the narrative and to intersperse dialogue that serves to promote rather than impede the flow. The careful writer will also maximize the dialogue by using it to individuate the characters and their personalities. The subject I have chosen for the parody is Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants." The story is well-known, both for what it tells the reader directly and what it does not. It is certainly a fine example of Hemingway's "iceberg theory"of writing.

The iceberg, for all its mass, reveals very little of itself as it drifts across the ocean. Yet there is a good deal of ice, tons of it, beneath the surface, as the crew of the *Titanic* tragically discovered. So it is with "Hills." The symbolic title (*Hills* for pregnancy, *White Elephants* for burdensome or impractical gifts), steers clear of explicit comment about abortion. In naming the girl Jig (The jig's up.), he helps us a bit, though he doesn't give the American lad a name, suggesting, perhaps, that fathers are often anonymous in these matters. Women obviously aren't this lucky. It's easy enough to tell from the dialogue, however, that the problem is abortion. "They just let the air in" is something his male character, the American, says repeatedly, a reference to a probable common misconception (no pun intended) of the period. Though abortion does involve rupturing the amniotic sac, thereby inducing labor, it's not so much a matter of air going in as it is of fluid coming out. Still, abortion, inasmuch as it was often a clandestine procedure, was pretty much of a mystery except to those who had one or those who performed one or assisted or possibly even observed. The American has apparently been around, which is why he seems to "know" so much about the operation, however misinformed, and insists that once it's done, there

will just be the "two of us," as it was before. Jig is hesitant, not only because she knows nothing about the procedure but also because she considers the baby a "love" child. Their becoming a threesome is something she can live with.

The story has an open-ended plot, with an ending which suggests that she will go along with the hustler's plan, but we don't know for sure. The last words Hemingway puts in her mouth are, "I feel fine." The word *fine* once meant the end or the conclusion, meanings now obsolete. The word comes from a Latin word *finis*, meaning end or boundary. There are other meanings, ranging from "judgemental sensitivity" to the "ability to make fine distinctions" to "physical conditioning," that is, having a finely tuned body. What Hemingway's Jig meant by "feeling fine"leaves much room for speculation. Ambiguities and implications aside, the story is excellent, if only for its reportorial approach to a subject more meaningful today because of the explosive events sparked by antiabortionists. For those who haven't read the story, the background I've provided should be sufficient for readers to appreciate the upcoming parody. *

Memory like an Elephant's

The hills were long and white. The midday sun beat down upon the station and put a sparkle on the two pairs of tracks on either side. Alongside the station was a small cafe filled with more flies than people. The American and the girl sat outside at a table in the shade. The train wasn't due for another hour.

"How long's it gonna stay?" Gyp asked the ticket agent.

"Two minutes. Next stop's Madrid." Gyp didn't like that two-minute thing but could do nothing about it. The waitress greeted them as he and the woman sat down.

"What'd she say?" he asked.

"Same thing as the others. Try to remember. *Buenos Dias* means good day. You know? Good day. Good day!"

"Aw right. Aw right!" he said. "Aw right!"

"It's not all right. After three years here you should know good day.

Three years! You've got a memory like an elephant's."

"What's that supposed to mean? What's so funny? Huh?"

"Nothing--just a private joke."

He eyed her suspiciously.

"It means you've got a great memory, Gyp. Fantastic memory."

"I don't like the way you say that, Jig."

"What'll it be?" the waitress asked.

"Two beers and a double shot of rum," Jig said.

"What about him?"

"Give him a short beer."

"What are you people saying?" Gyp asked.

"She said you look like a big drinker, a *macho*. I said you are."

He gave her a hard look.

"You know, I don't' trust you, Jig. I think you're up to something."

"Yeah, I'm up to 110 pounds, thanks to you."

"Screw you!" he said.

"You have—me, Susan, Elaine."

"Screw you, Jig."

"Mary, Janice, Marilyn. There anyone you haven't screwed, Gyp?"

The drinks arrived. Gyp sipped his. Jig gulped the rum down, then signalled the waitress for another, as she started on her first beer.

"Believe me, Jig. I want this baby. I really do."

"Fine. Take your half. I'm dropping mine off at the clinic."

"Come on, Jig. Be reasonable. It's only an hour, an hour and it's all over."

"It's more like eight--eight hours of sweating, grunting, groaning. Then the rest of my life I'll be sweating, grunting, and groaning. No, no, Gyp. I can't go that route."

"You don't have to. I'll take care of everything. I'll do the diapers, the laundry, take the kid to grandma all the time."

"Grandma?"

"Yeah. All that nice stuff. Grandma."

"I thought your mother was dead. What's with this Grandma stuff?"

"No, no. Your mom. Yours."

"Mine? I told you. They hanged her for butchering the old man. Kansas—remember?"

"No."

"You don't? Can't you remember anything?"

"So I forgot. What's the big deal?"

"I must have told you ten times."

"I can't remember everything. Some things I'm not so good at."

"Right. You're only good at screwing--and screwing up."

"Screw you, Jig!"

"Not any more, Gyp. Take your little screwdriver and go home like a nice little boy."

"Look. Just have this kid. Then we'll split. I'll take the kid. I'll love it, nourish it. I'll spoil it."

"You'll sell it. That's what you'll do. Sell it to some rich sterile Americans. You did it to Susan, Janice, Mary, Marilyn, Elaine."

"Where'd you get that idea?"

"I looked at your book when you were drunk."

"You're a liar. I don't remember ever being drunk."

"That's because you were too drunk to know you were drunk. So how could you remember what you didn't know?"

"Don't get flip with me, Jig. Look, this is a love baby. We just can't do something stupid and callous and brutal. This is our love baby, Jig."

"Love baby! We meet at five; we're in the sack at eight. That's love? It was supposed to be a quick tumble--recreation, not procreation. And it's all your fault, Gyp."

"It's your fault."

"No, no, no, it's your fault. You said you had protection."

"I thought you meant my gun. Just a communications problem. I read you wrong."

"Read this," she said, extending her middle finger straight up. No communications problem there. Get it?"

He got up and swung at her, but he was too short, and the table was too big. He swung wildly into open space. She ignored him and signalled for another round. Gyp watched her down the first beer before he could even finish his first sip. He looked into her eyes, hoping they would start to glaze by now. No. They looked soft, dry. He sipped again.

"So what'll we name the kid?"

"*Nada*," she said.

"*Nada, nada*? What's that?"

"Nothing."

"Yeah, but what's it mean? What's it translate?"

"Nothing! Nothing!"

"What's it translate?"

"Nothing. *Nada.* Nothing. Nothing is nothing. *Nada* is nothing."

"The kid'll be called nothing? Jeez?"

"The kid won't be called anything. The kid won't be--period. It'll be nothing. You know? Nothing--no kid--no body--no anything--nobody-no one--no anybody--no kid--*nada*--no nobody- -*nada--nada--nada.*"

"Will you please, please, please, please, please shut up? Will you do that for me? Will you? What do you say?"

"*Nada*--nobody--no anybody--no somebody--no kid--*nada, nada,* nothing, nothing, *nada*-- "

He reached over to slap her one again, but he had forgot. The table was still too big, and he was still too short. He swung once, twice, a third time. The waitress appeared and gave him a fly swatter. Jig ordered another round. She gulped down the first beer, then the second. Then, as Gyp got to his third sip, still nursing his first beer, she reached for his second one and downed that. The sound of the approaching train got louder.

"No use wasting this good beer," she said, eyeing Gyp's drink.

"How do you feel?" Gyp asked.

"Not so hot," she said. "Why don't you put the bags on the train. They're over there by the restrooms."

"I thought we only had one."

"I picked up a few things in Barcelona. Remember?"

"I guess I forgot. He looked toward the restroom. "Five?"

"Yes."

"Jeez. You need an elephant to lug those things."

"Not really. Any jackass can do it. Take the two big ones. Then come back for the other three. You can manage them in one grab. I'm going to the restroom."

Gyp took the bags, very heavy ones that nearly dragged him to the floor. He struggled with them like a wrestler trying to avoid a takedown, then came back for the next three. He fumbled and fought these for a while, then dragged himself to the train. He was pooped when he got there and started walking back slowly. Then he realized he had forgot. This was a two-minute stop. He hurried back to the table for Jig. *Nada.* Then he remembered. Restroom. He stood outside the door and waited and waited.

"Jig," he yelled. "Jig! The train's pulling out. Jig!"

The train chugged out, on its way to Madrid.

"Jig! Jig!"

A man came out of the restroom and gave him a very mean look.

"Jig! " he yelled, practically in the man's face.

"Ain't nobody in there, Boss. You better stop drinking. And you stop that nasty talk."

"Jig!" he yelled, even louder, as if to defy the stranger. The man turned, looked around, searching for his bags. *Nada. Nada.* He looked back at Gyp, who was still screaming, "Jig! Jig!"

"I warned you-all, the man said. "I warned you-all, Boss."

But Gyp had forgot, and before he could get the word out again, the man decked him with a neat right hook.

**author unknown

*Parodies, unless otherwise noted, are the works of the author.